

Overview and Scrutiny – Report to Council – Part Two

1. This report summarises the business considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 January 2024.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 25 January 2024

Health Scrutiny Update

2. Councillor Margaret France provided an update from the Lancashire County Council Health Scrutiny Committee.
3. She reported on the following:
 - NHS Lancashire Place Update and Future Arrangements
 - NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board – Recovery and Transformation
 - Concern was expressed by the Committee about NHS dentist provision in Lancashire.
 - Achievements on the work of the Lancashire Health and Wellbeing Board's priorities – Healthy Hearts, Happier Minds and Best Start in Life. It was noted that Chorley had a particular issue in terms of suicide risk.

Draft Budget 2024/25

4. Councillor Peter Wilson, Executive Member (Resources) attended the meeting to present the report on the Draft Budget 2024/25 which had been considered and agreed at Executive Cabinet on 18 January 2024.
5. The report set out the draft budget position for the council for 2024/25 and the forecast for 2025/26, reflecting the information contained within the Provisional Local Government Financial Settlement announced on 18th December 2023.
6. The the budget consultation process had now started which included the following proposals:
 - A proposed 2.99% increase in council tax in 2024/25 with no proposed cuts to services;
 - A forecast balanced budget for 2024/25, based on a 2.99% increase in council tax as noted above and the use of £0.365m of reserves;
 - A forecast budget shortfall for 2025/26 of £1.575m, to be addressed through the development and delivery of the council's savings programme
 - Proposals for the labour administration to invest in the priority areas identified in the report.

7. Councillor Wilson highlighted the investments referenced on page 58 which generate net income for the Council, such as the Market Walk Shopping Centre, Primrose Gardens, Strawberry Meadows and Tatton Gardens.
8. It was noted in the report that the figures in the report may be subject to change, pending receipt of the Final Local Government Financial Settlement announcement which is due from Government in early February 2024.
9. Councillor Wilson highlighted paragraph 27 of the report which stressed the fact that the Council has only received a one year settlement. In the absence of any figures or framework from Government, it is almost impossible to prepare a credible financial strategy beyond 31 March 2025 with any degree of confidence in the underlying assumptions. It was therefore difficult to develop the Medium Term Strategy in this context.
10. He also referred to financial risks and uncertainties which would have an impact on the Council's budget such as staffing costs following an agreed pay award.
11. Councillor Wilson addressed a query about Council Tax debt. He stressed that the Council have a very broad package which aims to investigate the reasons for non-payment of council tax, for example mental health issues. Individuals may be referred to services such as social prescribing to help address those issues.
12. Councillor Wilson responded to two issues raised by the Chair, in relation to energy costs and impact on projects for the area. Councillor Wilson indicated that hopefully energy costs would reduce, however they were unlikely to return to rates of 12 months ago. In relation to projects, e.g. arising from the Levelling Up Funding, these are still on track and would not be adversely impacted.
13. Finally, Councillor Wilson indicated that due to the financial challenges being faced by the Council, the Executive Cabinet would be looking closely at all areas of the Council in the next twelve months and suggested that scrutiny would have a key role in that process.

Youth Diversionary and Outreach Services

14. Councillor Bev Murray, Executive Member (Early Intervention) presented a report of the Director of Communities providing an overview of youth diversionary and outreach support services in the borough, including:
 - Tackling anti social behaviour – engagement of the Public Protection Team
 - INSPIRE Youth Zone Detached Outreach Programme
 - Children and Family Wellbeing Detached Service
 - Lancashire Violence Reduction Network

- Preston North End

15. Councillor Murray responded to questions from the Committee. Arising from the discussions it was agreed that details about the INSPIRE outreach programme (i.e. forthcoming planned activities in which areas) be communicated to members (e.g. via in the Know).
16. It was also suggested that INSPIRE be invited to jointly participate with the Council in local democracy week to engage with young people outside a school setting.

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Recruitment and Staff Retention

17. Councillor Michelle Beach, Chair of the Recruitment and Staff Retention Task Group introduced and summarised the report, outlining their findings and conclusions, and final recommendations. She thanked all members of the Task Group and the officers for their hard work and support.
18. The Vice Chair, Councillor Ryan Towers, responded to a query about the Council's apprenticeship scheme. He explained that there had been a substantial increase in the number of apprentices since the first cohort and that a number of improvements had been made e.g. a dedicated training officer to ensure the requisite time allocation was met for completing personal development plans.
19. The Committee agreed that the report be recommended to Executive Cabinet.

Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Task Group

20. It was noted that the next Scrutiny Task Group would look at Suicide Prevention and Bereavement. Members were asked to let Democratic Services know if they were interested.

Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

21. The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2023/24 was presented for information.
22. The Committee agreed the following amendments to the programme:

1. That the Community Safety Partnership Update report be considered on 14 March 2024;
2. That, arising from discussion on Special Expenses at the Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel on 23 November 2023, an update be provided on the outcome of that review as part of the Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring report at the next Panel meeting on 7 March 2024.

Town Centre Action Plan Update

23. Councillor Alistair Bradley, Executive Member (Economic Development and Public Service Reform), presented a report providing an overview of the matters related to anti-social behaviour (ASB) in connection with Chorley Town Centre.
24. Councillor Bradley responded to questions on the report.
25. Arising from the discussion it was agreed in principle that a similar framework be applied to other urban hub areas in the borough, as anti social behaviour can be sporadic and move outside Chorley Town Centre. The Chair suggested that if there were patterns of anti social behaviour which related to the approval of planning applications (retail outlets, eating outlets etc) it may be possible to put something in place at the planning stage.
26. Following a resolution to exclude the public and press, members discussed matters relating to the appendix to the report in private session.

Councillor Aidy Riggott

Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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